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## THE MOTHER TONGUE INQUIRY IN THE CENSUS OF POPULATION.

BY E. A. GOLDENWEISER

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The Thirteenth Census was the first to include in its population schedule an inquiry about mother tongue in addition to that about country of birth. The new inquiry was undertaken in response to an amendment to the act of Congress providing for the census, an amendment that was adopted considerably later than the general act, and after the schedules had been printed and the instructions to enumerators distributed. As a result the new inquiry did not have a separate column assigned to it in the schedules but was obliged to share the space assigned to country of birth returns. The occasion for the inclusion of the inquiry on "nationality or mother tongue" was a protest on the part of representatives of certain Slavic peoples who wished to be distinguished in the census statistics from the other immigrants from Austria and Hungary.

That a classification of the foreign-born purely by the political affiliations of their country of origin was not in all cases altogether satisfactory had been realized by the Bureau of the Census for a long time, and an attempt to go beyond that classification had been made in a somewhat roundabout way for the natives of several countries. In the case of Canada at each census beginning with that of 1870 a distinction has been made between Canada-English and Canada-French, regardless of territorial extraction but in accordance with language spoken which in this case largely coincides with ethnic stock. Another non-political division in the list of countries of birth was Poland, which has been shown separately at every census, 1860-1900; at the census of 1900 alone, were the natives of "Poland" divided by political affiliations, into Austrian, German, and Russian Poles. It should be noted, furthermore, that according to the instructions to enumerators in 1900, not all persons born in what had been the Polish Kingdom were to be returned as born in Poland but

only those who spoke Polish, so that this was clearly a mother tongue entry in disguise. Bohemia, which appeared as a country of birth at every census from 1870 to 1900, is another example of a province classified as a country of birth for the purpose of isolating the data for an ethnic group. While there were no special instructions about natives of this province, it is probable that the returns include under natives of Bohemia almost exclusively persons of Bohemian (and Moravian) mother tongue.

Thus it appears that for persons of Canadian origin and for two important Slavic peoples there have been published by the Census for several decades what are practically mother tongue statistics. These statistics, however, were not clearly understood because they were treated as country of birth data. The Thirteenth Census was the first to include a mother tongue inquiry as such and to make it of every foreign-born person about himself and of every native person of foreign or mixed parentage about his foreign parent or parents. The actual form of the inquiry was "What is your mother tongue or native language? What is your father's? What is your mother's?" It should be noted especially that the inquiry as asked by the enumerators related purely to native language, and was intended to mean habitual language at home before immigration, thus containing no direct reference to nationality, ethnic stock, or "race."

It may be of interest to statisticians to consider at this time the following questions:

1. How nearly accurate are the mother tongue returns of the Thirteenth Census?
2. To what extent do they throw light on the ethnic composition of our population?
3. What are the principal new data brought out by mother tongue statistics?
4. Is it worth while to incorporate the inquiry into future census schedules?

1. A study of the returns on mother tongue convinces one that for the great majority of persons they are accurate. The chief occasion for error arose in cases where the language spoken

was distinctly different from the ethnic stock of the people. In such cases some enumerators reported language spoken while others reported ethnic stock. The principal case of this sort was for persons born in the United Kingdom. The number of persons reported as speaking Irish, Scotch, and Welsh was evidently much greater than the number in the United States who actually speak those languages, and yet, on the other hand, the numbers were not nearly large enough to cover all the natives of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. In this case it was decided to count all of these people as English-speaking, as the large majority of them actually are, especially since information about the Irish, the Welsh, and the Scotch as ethnic units can be obtained from the data on persons born in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. In the case of the English proper it might be said that it is fully as significant to draw a distinction between the English from Canada and the English from England, as it is to draw one between some of the closely related ethnic groups. It is true that the inquiry failed to reveal the number of persons speaking Welsh or Gaelic but this failure can hardly be considered to be a very serious matter.

Another case in point refers to Syrians. A large majority of them speak Arabic and only a few, if any, speak Syrian (or Syriac). The returns showed clearly that in many cases Syrian was entered as a mother tongue simply because the person enumerated was a Syrian by ethnic origin, regardless of the language he used. The difficulty in this case was overcome by consolidating the two languages under the head of "Syrian and Arabic," the total for the two languages being no doubt accurate.

A certain amount of confusion resulted doubtless from the fact that the English names of languages do not always correspond to their names as used by their own people. Thus the Slovaks generally call their language "Slavish." The returns for Slavish, however, could not safely be edited "Slovak" because the enumerators often put down the generic name "Slavish" without taking the trouble to find out what kind of Slavish was used. Consequently there is a considerable group of "Slavish, not specified," and the figures for some

of the specific Slavic languages are not entirely reliable. The total for all Slavs, however, is doubtless quite accurate.

2. Turning now to the question of how nearly the mother tongue statistics represent ethnic stock, we are confronted, first of all, with the case of the Jews, who frequently speak the languages of their adopted countries and would, therefore, presumably not always be found in the mother tongue class "Yiddish and Hebrew." The total number of foreign-born persons reporting Yiddish as their mother tongue in 1910 was 1,051,767; of this number 838,193, or nearly 80 per cent., came from Russia; 11.8 per cent. from Austria; 3.9 from Roumania; 1.9 per cent. from Hungary, 1.3 per cent. from England, 0.8 per cent. from Germany, and small numbers from other countries. Some idea of the adequacy of the mother tongue figures for Yiddish as measures of ethnic stock may be obtained by a comparison with the returns for incoming immigrants who were classed as Hebrews in the reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration. The following table makes such a comparison:

TABLE I

Country.	Foreign-born White: 1910.			Immigrants: 1899-1910.		
	Total.	Reporting Yiddish Mother Tongue.		Total.	Hebrew.	
		Number.	Per Cent.		Number.	Per Cent.
Russia and Finland.....	1,732,421	838,332	48.4	1,749,075	765,531	43.8
Austria-Hungary.....	1,670,524	144,484	8.6	2,322,604	180,802	7.8
Roumania.....	65,920	41,342	62.7	61,073	54,827	89.8
United Kingdom.....	2,572,123	14,061	0.5	958,375	42,896	4.5
Germany.....	2,501,181	7,910	0.3	377,481	7,015	1.9

The figures show that in the case of Russia and Austria-Hungary the percentage speaking Yiddish among the foreign born is higher than the percentage speaking Hebrew among the immigrants. This is easily accounted for by the fact that the Jews return to their native country less frequently than the other peoples who come from Russia and Austria-Hungary. In the case of Roumania, United Kingdom, and Germany the reverse is the case. In the case of Germany and Roumania it

is doubtless true that many Jewish immigrants report mother tongues other than Yiddish, but the numbers involved are not large. In the case of United Kingdom the difference is largely due to the fact that Jewish immigration from England is of recent origin, and that the Jews form a larger proportion of the immigration from that country during the last dozen years than they do of the total number of natives of England in the United States which of course includes a large number of earlier immigrants.

It is probable, on the whole, that the number reported as speaking Yiddish by the census, 1,052,000, is a fairly complete figure for the foreign-born Jews in the United States, and the number of those one or both of whose parents spoke Yiddish, including those who themselves spoke Yiddish, 1,677,000, is a fairly complete statement of the Jewish population of the first two immigrant generations. Beyond this the census does not attempt to go.

The other case where mother tongue is a poor guide to ethnic stock is that of the immigrants from the United Kingdom. In that case, however, as has been explained above, the country of origin figures are fairly satisfactory indices of ethnic affiliations.

For all other important mother tongues the returns are largely indicative of ethnic stocks.

3. The principal information added by the mother tongue inquiry to the existing stock of knowledge about the population of the United States is contained in the figures for the number of Yiddish speaking people and the number of persons whose mother tongue belongs to one of the Slavic group of languages. We have had, as already mentioned, some data on the number of Poles and Bohemians. The mother tongue inquiry gives in addition the number of Slavs, as a whole, and the number of Slovaks, Russians, Ruthenians, Slovenians, Serbo-Croatians, Bulgarians and Lithuanians. (The latter not strictly Slavs but closely allied to them for many centuries.)

In addition to this, and from a somewhat different point of view, the mother tongue inquiry produces material in regard to the composition of the foreign elements from each country of birth. The following table shows the percentage that the

principal mother tongue formed of the total of each country of birth.

TABLE II.

Foreign-born White, 1910.		
Country of Birth.	Principal Mother Tongue.	Per Cent. of all Mother Tongues.
Ireland.....	English*	100.0
Italy.....	Italian.....	99.9
Wales.....	English*	99.9
Portugal.....	Portuguese.....	99.7
Scotland.....	English*	99.6
Sweden.....	Swedish.....	99.6
Greece.....	Greek.....	99.5
Mexico.....	Spanish.....	99.4
Norway.....	Norwegian.....	99.4
Denmark.....	Danish.....	98.9
Spain.....	Spanish.....	98.5
England.....	English*	97.6
Cuba.....	Spanish.....	97.2
Australia.....	English*	96.4
Netherlands.....	Dutch and Frisian.....	95.5
Bulgaria.....	Bulgarian.....	95.3
France.....	French.....	93.8
Servia.....	Servian.....	93.4
Newfoundland.....	English*	92.4
Luxemburg.....	German.....	92.3
Atlantic islands.....	Portuguese.....	90.6
Germany.....	German.....	90.4
Finland.....	Finnish.....	86.4
Switzerland.....	German.....	83.0
West Indies (other than Cuba and Porto Rico).....	English*	73.1
Pacific islands.....	English*	71.5
Montenegro.....	Montenegrin.....	69.4
Canada.....	English*	65.3
Central America.....	Spanish.....	64.1
Roumania.....	Yiddish.....	62.7
Russia.....	Yiddish.....	52.3
Belgium.....	Flemish.....	51.1
Turkey in Asia.....	Syrian and Arabic.....	47.0
Hungary.....	Magyar.....	46.0
Turkey in Europe.....	Greek.....	38.3
Africa.....	English*	34.7
South America.....	Spanish.....	32.2
Austria.....	Polish.....	28.0

\*Including persons reporting Irish, Scotch, and Welsh.

It is apparent that for most of the important countries the number reporting the same mother tongue is so large that the inquiry adds little to our knowledge of the people. This fact is, of course, in itself a contribution to population statistics. Of the numerically important countries of birth Switzerland, Canada, Russia, Hungary, and Austria, are the only ones where the dominant mother tongue comprises less than nine tenths of the total, the percentage in Austria being the lowest, 28 per cent. It is worth noting that more than nine tenths of the persons born in Germany speak German. Since

the number of persons from Germany is very large the 10 per cent. of non-Germans included in it are worth considering. They are of course for the most part Polish. It is interesting to observe, conversely, that of the 2,759,000 persons of German mother tongue, only 2,260,000 came from Germany; Austria, Russia, Switzerland, and Hungary each contributing a large number of Germans. When both the first and the second generations are included the total number of German stock is 8,817,000, or more than a million greater than the number having Germany as a country of origin, 7,728,000.

4. The mother tongue inquiry, in our judgment, has justified its inclusion in the population schedule. It has furnished a basis for determining the number of persons of several ethnic affiliations that had previously been dependent on guesses. If the ethnic composition of the immigration from a country should change, as it is apparently now changing in the case of Russia, the mother tongue figures will furnish a measure of the effect of the change on the population of the United States. To afford the maximum amount of usefulness the data on mother tongue, whether tabulated in detail for all countries of origin or not should, for some of the important and ethnically heterogeneous countries, appear as subheads under the names of the countries; all the figures presented for such countries would then be subdivided by mother tongue, as is now done in the case of Canada. In that way the information about age composition, occupations, literacy, naturalization, etc., would be available not only for countries of origin but for the principal mother tongue groups, and that without a laborious double tabulation. The experience of the Thirteenth Census seems to indicate on the whole that the mother tongue question is well worth retaining in future enumerations, at least as regards such ethnically composite countries as Russia, Austria, Hungary, and Germany.

The final table shows for 1910 the principal mother tongues, reported for foreign-born white persons and for the total foreign white stock which includes the foreign born and the natives of foreign or mixed parentage.



TABLE III.

Mother Tongue.	Foreign-born White.		Foreign White Stock.	
	Number.	Percentage Distribution.	Number.	Percentage Distribution.
Total.....	13,345,545	100.0	32,243,382	100.0
English*.....	3,363,792	25.2	10,037,420	31.1
Germanic.....				
German.....	2,759,032	20.7	8,817,271	27.3
Dutch and Frisian.....	126,045	0.9	324,930	1.0
Flemish.....	25,780	0.2	44,806	0.1
Scandinavian.....				
Swedish.....	683,218	5.1	1,445,869	4.5
Norwegian.....	402,587	3.0	1,009,854	3.1
Danish.....	186,345	1.4	446,473	1.4
Latin and Greek.....				
Italian.....	1,365,110	10.2	2,151,422	6.7
French.....	528,842	4.0	1,357,169	4.2
Spanish.....	258,131	1.9	448,198	1.4
Portuguese.....	72,649	0.5	141,268	0.4
Roumanian.....	42,277	0.3	51,124	0.2
Greek.....	118,379	0.9	130,379	0.4
Slavic and Lettic.....				
Polish.....	943,781	7.1	1,707,640	5.3
Bohemian and Moravian.....	228,738	1.7	539,392	1.7
Slovak.....	166,474	1.2	284,444	0.9
Russian.....	57,926	0.4	95,137	0.3
Ruthenian.....	25,131	0.2	35,359	0.1
Slovenian.....	123,631	0.9	183,431	0.6
Serbo-Croatian.....	105,669	0.8	129,254	0.4
Croatian.....	74,036	0.6	93,036	0.3
Dalmatian.....	4,344	†	5,505	†
Servian.....	23,403	0.2	26,752	0.1
Montenegrin.....	3,886	†	3,961	†
Bulgarian.....	18,341	0.1	19,380	0.1
Slavic, n.s.....	21,012	0.2	35,195	0.1
Lithuanian and Lettish.....	140,963	1.1	211,235	0.7
Unclassified.....				
Yiddish and Hebrew.....	1,051,767	7.9	1,676,762	5.2
Magyar.....	229,094	1.7	320,893	1.0
Finnish.....	120,086	0.9	200,688	0.6
Armenian.....	23,938	0.2	30,021	0.1
Syrian and Arabic.....	32,868	0.2	46,727	0.1
Turkish.....	4,709	†	5,441	†
Albanian.....	2,312	†	2,366	†
All other.....	646	†	790	†
Unknown.....	116,272	0.9	313,044	1.0

\* Includes persons reporting Irish, Scotch, and Welsh.

† Less than one-tenth of 1 per cent.